Resolution Establishing Definitions Related to Distance Education
Resolution of Non-handbook Policy
EPSA
March 4, 2024
Passed

Whereas the portion of a credit hour corresponding to direct instructional time in courses at Ohio University may involve delivering content in ways that incorporate distance learning and other non-traditional instructional arrangements,

Whereas the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) require that the institution’s program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations, including distance education;

Whereas both the federal government and HLC provide precise definitions for terms associated with distance education which have been incorporated into their official statements of expectations required for institutional offerings;

Whereas Ohio University has not adopted precise language concerning the terminology and expectations for distance education, leading to possible ambiguity in both the writing and interpretation of policies,

Be It Resolved that the following definitions, consistent with the requirements of the Higher Learning Commission and federal government, shall be adopted for official use at Ohio University:

I. **Distance education** is defined to be education that uses one or more of the technologies listed below to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors, and to support regular and substantive interaction\(^1\) between the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously.

The technologies that may be used to offer distance education include:

a. The internet;

b. One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite or wireless communications devices;

c. Audio conference; or

d. Other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed above.

\(^1\) See item V below
II. **Correspondence education** is defined to be an educational experience provided by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructors. Interaction between instructors and students in a correspondence course is limited, NOT regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the students. A correspondence education course is not distance education.

III. **Modality**: Courses at Ohio University may be delivered in different modalities, and the modality of a particular section of a course is determined by the extent to which the direct instruction incorporates distance education.

- **Face-to-face courses** are those in which most of the direct instruction occurs in settings where the instructor and students are present in the same physical learning space. Face-to-face courses may involve some distance education (less than 25% of total direct instruction time).
- **Distance courses** are those in which most of the direct instruction occurs in settings where the instructor and students are not present in the same physical learning space. Distance courses may involve some face-to-face education (less than 25% of total direct instruction time).
- **Fully online courses** are those in which all (100%) of the direct instruction is distance education, with no face-to-face activities.
- **Hybrid courses** are those in which the direct instruction contains significant portions of both face-to-face and distance education. A course is designated as hybrid if direct instruction combines some face-to-face modality (between 25%-75% of total direct instruction time) and some distance modality (between 25-75% of total direct instruction time).
- **Blended courses** are those that deliver instruction to students through a combination of the above modalities. For example, a blended course may be delivered as a face-to-face course to some students while simultaneously being delivered as a distance course to other students.

IV. Distance education activities are classified as either **synchronous** or **asynchronous**, depending on how the content is delivered.

- An activity is **synchronous** if instruction occurs in real-time and requires students to participate in class activities, discussions, and lectures at specific scheduled times, made known at the time of registration. This type of instruction allows students to interact with their instructor and classmates in real-time. Synchronous instruction also includes activities such as live chat sessions or group projects that require students to collaborate in real-time.
- An activity is **asynchronous** if instruction is pre-recorded or otherwise prepared ahead-of-time and can be accessed by students at any time. This type of instruction typically involves the use of pre-recorded video lectures, discussion boards, and
other online activities that students can complete at their own pace. While students are not required to attend scheduled class sessions, they are often expected to complete assignments and participate in online discussions regularly.

V. Institutions are expected to ensure regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors in distance education offerings. These terms are defined as follows:

- **Substantive interaction** is defined as engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, that includes at least two of the following:
  a. providing direct instruction, that is, live, synchronous instruction where both the instructor and the student are online and in communication at the same time.²
  b. assessing or providing feedback on a student’s coursework
  c. providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course
  d. facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course; or
  e. other instructional activities approved by HLC or the program’s accrediting agency.

- **Regular interaction** between instructors and students involves, prior to the student’s completion of a course, BOTH
  a. Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course; and
  b. Monitoring the student’s academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

**Be It Further Resolved** that these definitions shall be revisited when warranted by changes in guidance from the federal government or our accrediting body.

² Federal Department of Education guidance states “When the Department uses the term “direct instruction,” it means live, synchronous instruction where both the instructor and the student are online and in communication at the same time.” See Department of Education letter to WCET.